



# NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Anne Smrcina  
781-545-8026 x204  
781-738-2242

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
August 30, 2011

## **NOAA, France partner in historic effort to protect North Atlantic humpback whales**

NOAA and France's Protected Areas Agency have signed a "sister sanctuary" agreement to support the protection of endangered humpback whales that migrate annually more than 3,000 miles between NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary off the Massachusetts coast and Agoa Marine Mammal Sanctuary in the Caribbean's French Antilles.

The agreement will help improve humpback whale recovery in the North Atlantic by enhancing management coordination efforts between the two sanctuaries. This effort will help improve knowledge about humpbacks in the Atlantic and the threats they face from both natural and man-made changes to their environment. Both sanctuaries provide critical support for the same population of whales, which spend spring and summer in the rich feeding grounds of Stellwagen Bank before heading south to the warmer waters of the Caribbean Sea in late fall to mate and give birth to their young. The French Antilles islands are at the Caribbean's eastern edge.

As sister sanctuaries, the two sites will explore new avenues for collaborative education, scientific and management efforts, including joint-research and monitoring programs. NOAA anticipates the relationship will be crucial to the long-term conservation of the North Atlantic humpback whale population, as well as to the development of future cooperative agreements with other countries.

This new agreement builds on an effort begun in 2006 when the world's first sister sanctuary initiative focused on trans-boundary humpback whales and their critical habitats was launched between the Stellwagen Bank Sanctuary and the Dominican Republic. Another agreement signed in July between Stellwagen Bank and the government of Bermuda also strives to help protect the species along its migration route from the Gulf of Maine to the Caribbean Sea through cooperation on scientific and educational programs.

"The expansion of our sister sanctuary work to include the French Antilles will play a powerful role in protecting endangered humpback whales, and the opportunity for international cooperation in marine conservation is invaluable," said Daniel J. Basta, director, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. "This agreement has the potential to improve our scientific knowledge, enhance our management ability and increase awareness of the sister sanctuary program to other nations interested in such a partnership – all of which are benefits that extend far beyond the boundaries of the sanctuaries involved."

Basta and Olivier LaRoussinie, director of France's Marine Protected Areas Agency, signed the memorandum of understanding to create the sister sanctuary partnership. The agreement goes into effect immediately and contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Environment Programme's Marine Mammal Action Plan for the Caribbean region, which recognizes the importance of protecting critical humpback whale habitats as part of a regional corridor.

"We share whales with other nations, just as we share the responsibility for protecting these spectacular animals," said Dr. Craig MacDonald, Stellwagen Bank superintendent. "Our broadest mandate is to engender a new discussion in our society about the importance of

protecting trans-boundary species, the special places where they live, and our responsibility as global stewards.”

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 842 square miles of ocean, stretching between Cape Ann and Cape Cod. Renowned for its remarkable productivity, the sanctuary supports a rich diversity of marine life, including 22 species of marine mammals, more than 53 species of seabirds, in excess of 80 species of fishes, and hundreds of marine invertebrates.

NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).

On the Web:

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/>